

**DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION**

DIVISION OF AERONAUTICS M.S. #40

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**INFORMATION CONCERNING HOSPITAL HELIPORTS  
AND EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICE LANDING SITES**

The following information should be helpful in understanding the difference between a hospital heliport and an emergency medical service helicopter landing site as they relate to State and Federal laws and regulations. The references used include:

- *California Public Utilities Code (PUC), Section 21001, et seq.*
- *California Code of Regulations (CCR's), Title 21, Sections 3525 through 3560.*
- *Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) Advisory Circular 150/5390-2A, Heliport Design.*
- *Federal Aviation Regulation (FAR) Part 157, Notice of Construction, Activation, and Deactivation of Airports.*

California State law (PUC 21663) requires that all heliports have a State Permit to operate unless specifically exempted. One such exemption is an Emergency Medical Service (EMS) Helicopter Landing Site, defined in CCR, Title 21, Section 3527(g) as follows: "*A site used for the landing and taking off of EMS helicopters that is located at or as near as practical to a medical emergency or at or near a medical facility and*

*(1) has been designated an EMS landing site by an officer authorized by a public safety agency, as defined in PUC Section 21662.1, using criteria that the public safety agency has determined is reasonable and prudent for the safe operation of EMS helicopters and*

*(2) is used, over any twelve month period, for no more than an average of six landings per month with a patient or patients on the helicopter, except to allow for adequate medical response to a mass casualty event even if that response causes the site to be used beyond these limits, and*

*(3) is not marked as a permitted heliport as described in Section 3554 of these regulations and*

*(4) is used only for emergency medical purposes."*

Examples of public safety agencies could be a fire department, police department, sheriff's department, County EMS Agency, etc.

Not to be confused is the criteria required by the CCR's for a State permitted heliport, which is based on the FAA's Heliport Design guide. Criteria contained in the guide provides the accepted level of safety deemed necessary for a hospital heliport intended for regular medical helicopter operations. Neither the FAA's guide nor Caltrans has established criteria for EMS Helicopter Landing Sites. Therefore, the level of safety of each site is unknown, as each individual public safety agency may have their own criteria, which may or may not be equivalent to established heliport safety standards.

Although PUC Section 21662.1 allows EMS Helicopter Landing Sites to be designated at any medical facility, a review of the history of the legislation indicates that the intent was to allow small or rural medical facilities to accept an occasional emergency patient or transfer a patient to a higher care level hospital. These types of facilities would normally not have the need to establish a heliport for infrequent helicopter operations and we agree should be exempted from the permit requirement. However, most large hospitals, and certainly trauma centers, are in the emergency care business where patient transfer by helicopter is quite common. In these cases, we feel the helicopter crew, the patient and the public should be afforded the level of safety that a

permitted heliport, meeting the established safety standards, would provide. Being designated as an EMS Helicopter Landing Site with the intent of being used on a regular basis seems inappropriate and could be considered an attempt to circumvent the law.

The FAA's Heliport Design guide defines medical emergency sites as follows: "An unprepared site at or near the scene of an accident or similar medical emergency on which a helicopter may land to pick up a patient in order to provide emergency medical transport. A designated helicopter landing area located at a hospital or medical facility is a heliport and not a medical emergency site." The guide also refers to FAR Part 157, which requires the filing of a Notice of Landing Area Proposal (FAA Form 7480-1) with the FAA. Filing is required if the site is intended to be used 1) for a period of more than 30 days or 2) for more than three days in any one week and more than ten operations will be conducted in any one day.

If a public safety agency decides to designate a site as an EMS Helicopter Landing Site in accordance with PUC Section 21662.1, and accepts the liability for the safety of its use, the following items should be considered:

- Is the approval for one specific operation, or for a specified time period (1 month, 1 year, until a site is permitted, forever?)
- How many operations will be allowed in a given time period? (How much noise will the neighbors tolerate?)
- Does the approval allow night operations? Is the site adequately lighted?
- What size helicopters will be allowed considering the size of the landing site?
- What approach/departure paths will be approved to ensure adequate obstruction clearances? Should the obstructions be marked and/or lighted?
- What type of security and fire protection will be required?
- If the site is in an auto parking lot, is there a planned procedure to have the vehicles moved in a timely manner?
- Will an environmental review be required to comply with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)?

The Department recognizes the importance of EMS helicopters and their ability to quickly transport critically injured people to hospitals for emergency care, and to transfer critical patients to other hospitals where a higher level of emergency care is available. We have always encouraged hospitals to develop a permitted heliport which will ensure its users a safe and dependable facility meeting established safety standards. In fact, there are currently more than 140 permitted hospital heliports in California and that number is rapidly growing as more hospitals are becoming trauma centers and more EMS helicopter providers are becoming available.

We are always available to assist any hospital in developing a heliport and would be pleased to meet with hospital officials to discuss the safety standards and the permitting requirements. For more information contact:

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